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DISCUSSION.

PRAGMATISM, SCIENCE AND TRUTH.

A FEW years ago, in discussing an article by Professor Fite on "The Experience Philosophy,"¹ I concluded in effect that he had saved himself from pragmatism only by so defining this doctrine that, in excluding himself, he excluded many if not all pragmatists. Much the same thing might be said of the Professor Fite's highly stimulating papers on "Pragmatism and Science" and "Pragmatism and Truth"² were it not that he here assumes the rôle of the evangel of a newer pragmatism—the voice of one crying in the wilderness of a mechanistic materialism calling upon pragmatists to repent and be baptized into a more "human" and a more "spiritual" pragmatism. Professor Fite's own figure for the function of these papers is that of the midwife assisting a half-born, half-strangled pragmatism into the world.

The first article begins with the observation that if pragmatists had been less interested in their 'new name' for old ways of thinking and more in the 'old ways' they would not have failed to see that "the first and greatest of their school" was Kant. Yet, in the paragraphs immediately following, Professor Fite points out differences between Kant and pragmatism so fundamental that it would seem they might well constitute sufficient reason for not reckoning Kant as "the first and greatest of the school." Especially is this true of the difference between the teaching of Kant and that of pragmatism concerning the relation between reason and desire, to say nothing of Kant's fixed categories. Upon just this difference hang the law and the prophets of pragmatism.

At all events, on this point of difference between Kant and the pragmatists Professor Fite stands with the pragmatists in holding that what is reasonable and what is true cannot be determined apart from human wants and needs. But now follows what to me is an amazing statement concerning the pragmatic conception of 'needs'—imputed in particular to American pragmatists and still more in particular to Professor Dewey and myself. "I think I am not wrong," says Professor Fite, "in saying that our American pragmatism is disposed to

¹ THE PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW, Vol. XV.

² *Ibid.*, Vol. XXIII.

emphasize the need of bread and butter and to hold that spiritual needs are only bread and butter needs in disguise"! "Why do we need to look upon nature as a succession of cause and effect? Their answer is because we need it in our business; or better perhaps, because we need it in our factory. For the term by which they [Professor Dewey and myself] prefer to name their special brand of pragmatism is *instrumentalism*. Instrumentalism teaches that the categories of science are but so many tools or instruments . . . for gratifying our needs. And what needs? So far as I can see the only needs to be gratified by such instruments are the needs of bread and butter."

This last sentence might mean that since pragmatists emphasize science, and since, on Professor Fite's view—a startling one surely—the only needs which the categories of science serve are bread and butter needs, therefore the only needs that pragmatists *should* recognize are bread and butter needs. But Professor Fite has already gone further than that. He has said that for them "spiritual needs are only bread and butter needs in disguise." In the former discussion, to which I have referred, I complained of the lack of citations in support of Professor Fite's interpretations, and when one turns from the statements I have just quoted to such passages as the following the complaint again seems justified.¹ "The antecedents of thought (that is the 'needs' to whose problems thought is a response) are our universe of life and love, of struggle and appreciation." The passage then specifies such things as "snow on the ground"; "The Monroe Doctrine"; "the relation of art to industry"; "The poetic quality of a painting of Boticelli"; "The best way to reduce expenses"; "Whether and how to renew the ties of a broken friendship" (Professor Fite's typical instance of a 'spiritual' need). Again; "Anything—event, act, value, ideal, person, or place may be an object of thought. Reflection busies itself alike with physical nature, the record of social achievement, and the endeavors of social aspiration."² And again: "Thinking is a mode or stage of Conduct. And by 'conduct' the pragmatist means action which is seeking to maintain and develop that which (*i. e.*, anything which) is satisfying or to get rid of that which is dissatisfying."³ Do not such statements, and there are many similar, to say nothing of innumerable implications of the same

¹ Professor Dashiell in his recent admirable discussion of these papers in the *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods* makes the same point.

² Dewey, *Studies in Logical Theory*, Chap. I.

³ *Pragmatism and its Critics*, p. 4.

meaning, justify the exclamation marks I have placed after Professor Fite's 'bread and butter' interpretation. And Professor Fite himself appears visited with some misgivings; for he says that he is convinced that his interpretation will be called 'vulgar.' But he does not give the reason for this conviction.

But the diagnosis of such glaring discrepancies as we have here, calls for something more deep-seated than careless reading. And this I think is to be found in certain dichotomies which Professor Fite retains and which pragmatism believes should be 'superseded.' One of these is the antithesis of 'the practical' and 'the spiritual.' For Professor Fite, 'practical' needs are bread and butter needs; the need for 'understanding,' for 'communion,' 'fellowship,' is 'spiritual.' For pragmatism, every need, whether for bread and butter or for companionship, in so far as its satisfaction presents a *problem*, is 'practical,' and as calling for specific means for its realization, it is 'material;' in so far as the process of satisfying the need reacts into the need, affecting both its content and value, it is 'spiritual.' How to proceed in establishing communion and fellowship with a human being is quite as 'practical' and may be a much more difficult problem than getting bread and butter from him. That every 'need' has its *Stoff*, its material, both on the side of its content and its 'instruments' seems equally clear. 'The communion and fellowship of the saints' could not be conceived, even by the saints themselves, without a 'spiritual body.' Spirits are kindred if their embodiments are kindred. And this is implied in Professor Fite's statement that the only way we can understand the solar-system is by construing it in terms "of our own human motives for action" (p. 420).

In the further development of this antithesis of the 'practical' and the 'spiritual,' mathematical and mechanical science is accepted as sufficient for 'practical,' *i. e.*, for bread and butter needs, but as quite foreign to 'spiritual needs.' "To look upon nature as a mechanism after the fashion of physics and chemistry does indeed satisfy the need for bread and butter. . . . But I cannot conceive any one to be satisfied with this mechanical view who feels that his need of living with her, or even upon her, is also a need for understanding and fellowship" (p. 415).

Here the pragmatist would reciprocate Professor Fite's midwifely services, by pointing out that even his humanism is not yet full-born, that it concedes too much to mechanism on the one side and too little on the other. The process of getting bread and butter is not only an affair of mathematical, physical, and chemical analysis—but of

'intuition' both of persons and things. It is 'practical' but it is neither purely mechanical, nor purely spiritual but social, 'human.' Moreover, the *problem of acquiring* understanding, whether of nature or of persons, always involves some sort of mechanism in its solution, *i. e.*, some kind of an equation of means and end which, I take it, is the essence of mechanism. The pragmatist is haunted by no terrors of mechanism—not because he has relegated mechanism to a realm of merely 'practical' or 'bodily' needs, but because he makes mechanical formulations 'instrumental' in the most 'spiritual' enterprises. And this suggests the query: Whether this recognition of the instrumental function of mechanics in the conduct of the most spiritual interests is not possibly a more plausible explanation of the pragmatists' "strange reverence for science" than Dr. Fite's suggestion that it is a case of the frailty that "likes to be seen on the arm of a Duke!"

The pragmatists' 'reverence for science' might indeed seem strange if it were true, as Professor Fite thinks it is, that pragmatism has accepted modern science "without criticism" (p. 426). But pragmatism is no less a critique of science than of philosophy. If it has insisted on the standpoint and method of science in philosophy, it has stood equally for the 'human,' if you please the 'spiritual,' element in science. Its doctrine is that the concepts and theories of science have validity so long, and in so far as they are of value in dealing with problems that are more than problems of mere bread and butter on the one hand, and more than purely intellectual problems on the other.

If it be true that modern science has taken some of its concepts as metaphysically final, it is difficult to see how we are to say, as Professor Fite does, that pragmatism takes the theories of science 'instrumentally' and yet without criticism. And, *a fortiori*, how can it be said that "the very name 'instrumentalism' means that the instrument, now *once for all accepted as such*, stands as a barrier to any deeper or more human interpretation of our needs?" The whole meaning of 'instrumentalism' is that no instrument *can* be accepted once for all except for the specific problem or problems for which it is forged. Instruments are forged for the specific work they are to do, and as the problems change the instruments must change.

It is puzzling also to read that pragmatism is guilty of "accepting the instrument once for all," and at the same time is "justly open to the charge of creating a subjective and fictitious world by constantly speaking as if an invention (*i. e.*, an 'instrument') were invented out of nothing," and by "determining truth by our specific and transient needs" and thus making truth "artificial and capricious." Pragma-

tism is thus by turns or at the same time, according to Professor Fite, too scientific to be human and too human to be scientific. But this, I think, is due to failure to see that pragmatism hath joined what Professor Fite still keeps asunder—mechanism and humanism. In this union, to be sure, both have surrendered their old metaphysical status in which, of course, no coöperation was possible.

The problem of truth Professor Fite poses as follows: "When the pragmatist asserts that the truth is what he finds useful to believe, the realist or natural scientist meets him with the question: But what of the facts? and the pragmatist then retorts by saying that any unwelcome experience he will decline to treat as a fact. But this only means, so far as I can see, that the distinction between truth and fiction is thoroughly artificial and capricious, and this is the charge which is most frequently, and, I should say, most justly laid at the pragmatist's door" (pp. 428-429). This means, I suppose, that if a pragmatist should awake to the "unwelcome experience" of finding his room ablaze, he would, or according to his theory he should, "decline to treat it as a fact."

First we may note the difficulty of squaring this account of the pragmatist's attitude toward 'unwelcome' experiences with the 'bread and butter' interpretation. In the latter, the pragmatist was portrayed as doing all his thinking, including the use of all the categories and mechanism of science, in order to get rid of the 'unwelcome experience' of hunger. Here he is supposed to decline to recognize hunger as a fact. And after having credited, or discredited, pragmatism with "a strange reverence" for the methods of modern science, Professor Fite could not retort that the only thinking the pragmatist should do is to think that the hunger does not exist. On the other hand, how strange it sounds to hear a philosophy that declines to recognize "unwelcome experiences" such as hunger, called a bread and butter philosophy! And when pragmatism thus turns its back on "unwelcome experiences," what is its motive to thinking? Or, have we another paradox of bread and butter thinking, to satisfy purely intellectual needs?

In the treatment of 'the independence of truth,' much of the discussion is about the independence of the 'fact,' of the 'object,' of 'reality,' and of the 'knower.' And one wonders if these are to be substituted in turn for truth, and if not, what the bearing of their independence is upon the independence of truth. Professor Fite's definition of truth would seem to preclude substitution. He conceives truth to be an 'agreement,' reached as a result of a process of

'bargaining,' of negotiation, between two beings whether these beings are persons or persons and things. However, the main constructive feature of Professor Fite's papers is the suggestion that the kind of knowing that occurs when one person knows another should be taken as typical, rather than the judgment about a table or even a green tree. And the next interesting point in his exposition is that in this process of 'bargaining,' between the knower and the thing known, "*all is being made—not only the agreement which constitutes truth, but the terms between which the agreement is formed, the knower as well as the object of his knowledge.*"¹

But what now of independence? In view of the passage just quoted Professor Fite's reply again presents difficulties. The answer is that, while in order to escape a world of 'hard' facts in which no bargaining would be possible we must recognize that in the process of bargaining, that is of knowing, not only truth but the knower and the object are being made, yet in order to be independent realists (which Professor Fite thinks we must be in any case), we must hold that in knowing "I am not made by the object, neither is the object of my knowledge made by me" (p. 518). Now there would be no difficulty here if in the first passage we understand by 'being made,' what evidently is intended, viz., being modified in some specific way, not created *in toto*; and if likewise in the second passage we understand that neither the knower nor the object is made *in toto*. All of which would seem to reduce to a favorite thesis of pragmatism that the knower is something more than a knower, and that the object is something more than a thing to be known. But Professor Fite seems to mean something different from this in the second passage as he further expands it. That the object is not made by the knower, means in the case of one person knowing another, *e. g.*, Plato, that "there is a certain unity of personality which is Plato's and which is not made by the way he is taken." And this unity may have "a consistency equal to that of the law of gravitation." Moreover, notwithstanding all that has been said about 'bargaining,' we are to understand that "the final agreement which we call truth is no mere adjustment, no mere compromise effected by rounding the corners of a square peg to make it fitter for a round hole, at the same time squaring somewhat the hole. So far as the agreement is a matter of compromise, thus far it is false." Again, if the meaning of this is that in any particular case of 'bargaining' the unity of personality is altered only in some specific manner, there is no difficulty. But

¹ P. 518. Italics mine.

if it means, as it appears to mean, that there is a core of personality which remains untouched and untouchable by this or any other 'bargaining,' then are we not in trouble? For we must now take the first passage in which both "the knower and object are being made" to mean that they are 'being made' in certain external and superficial aspects, while the "inner unity of personality" remains unaffected. Furthermore, we shall have on our hands in this inner unity of personality precisely one of those 'hard' facts which Professor Fite has convincingly shown must be rejected. On the other side, if Professor Fite disclaims this interpretation of the independent unity of personality, how then will his view of it differ from that of the pragmatist—even of the instrumentalist? For, as already indicated, the instrumentalist cannot even get his bargaining started without assuming as 'the antecedents of thought' beings of all kinds in interaction. But none of these are 'hard' beings, nor do they conceal a hard unchangeable core of personality under a soft exterior. There is no part or character of them that may not be modified in 'bargaining' with other beings.

But whatever the kind and amount of independence the knower and the object may have, what is the bearing of this upon the independence of truth? For neither the knower nor the object is truth. Truth, as Professor Fite says, consists in the agreement reached through bargaining between the knower and the object; furthermore, this truth is "all made" in the bargaining process. Of what then is it independent? And in what way has it more independence than instrumentalism gives it? Whether the bargaining is for friendship or for bread and butter, the 'agreement which constitutes truth' is reached in response to a need which is personal, human, and equally objective in both cases.

But what meaning is there now in calling this agreement, after it has been reached, either dependent or independent. From the standpoint of the question of its origin it may be said to be dependent upon all the elements in the 'bargaining' process. But as an achieved reality,—and to be truth the agreement has to be achieved,—what can its dependence or independence mean? The dependence or independence of things and persons that are or may become parties to the agreement is quite a different matter. But even these are not to be classified as dependent or independent, or as of varying degrees of dependence or independence at large, as one would classify things as round or square. The dependence or independence of things and persons is on *one another*, and is for specific matters in some

specific enterprise. But dependence and independence in this sense can not be predicated of an achieved agreement. And if not in this sense then in what significant sense do they apply? It is Professor Fite's complaint that pragmatism has ignored the problem of "the independence of truth." The explanation of this ignorance is that for pragmatism there is no such problem.

A. W. MOORE.

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO.